

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as shown below.

1. to 5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently Amended) An image processing method comprising:

a search step of searching for original digital data stored in storage means on the basis of an input image;

an extraction step of extracting difference information by comparing the original digital data retrieved in the search step and the input image;

a vectorization step of converting the difference information extracted in the extraction step into vector data;

a composition step of compositing the difference information that has been converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

~~The method according to claim 1, further comprising~~

a checking step of checking whether or not to inhibit information about the retrieved original digital data from being changed, ~~and~~

wherein if it is determined in the checking step that a change in information is not inhibited, the difference information ~~data~~ extracted in the extraction step is converted into vector data in the vectorization step, and the difference information that has been converted into the vector data is composited to the original digital data in the composition step, and if it is determined in the checking step that a change in information is inhibited, the difference information extracted in the extraction step and information

other than the difference information which is included in the input image are converted into vector data in the vectorization step.

7. (Cancelled)

8. (Currently Amended) An image processing method comprising:
a search step of searching for original digital data stored in storage means on
the basis of an input image;

an extraction step of extracting difference information by comparing the
original digital data retrieved in the search step and the input image;

a vectorization step of converting the difference information extracted in the
extraction step into vector data;

a composition step of compositing the difference information that has been
converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

~~The method according to claim 1, further comprising~~

~~a storage step of storing the extracted difference information as an~~
~~independent file, and~~

~~wherein the difference information as the independent file is stored in a~~
~~format associated with the original digital data, and is composited and output in the~~
~~composition step when the difference information is to be printed out.~~

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) An image processing method comprising:
a search step of searching for original digital data stored in storage means on
the basis of an input image;
an extraction step of extracting difference information by comparing the
original digital data retrieved in the search step and the input image;
a vectorization step of converting the difference information extracted in the
extraction step into vector data;
a composition step of compositing the difference information that has been
converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and
~~The method according to claim 1, further comprising~~
a vectorization step of converting the entire input image into vector data
when no original digital file can be retrieved in the search step.

11. to 12. (Cancelled)

13. (Original) An image processing method comprising:
a search step of searching for an original data file corresponding to an input
image;
a checking step of checking, based on a user's instruction, whether the input
image is to be converted into vector data immediately or later; and
a vectorization step of converting the input image, the original data file of
which cannot be retrieved, into vector data,

wherein the vectorization step includes a step of immediately converting the input image into vector data when it is determined in the checking step that the input image is to be converted into vector data immediately, and converting, when it is determined in the checking step that the input image is to be converted into vector data later, the input image into vector data when a predetermined condition is met.

14. (Original) The method according to claim 13, wherein the predetermined condition is met when a load on image processing means is light.

15. (Original) The method according to claim 13, wherein the checking step includes a step of registering status based on the user's instruction in a vectorization process table in association with the input image.

16. (Original) The method according to claim 13, further comprising a storage step of storing the input image that has been converted into the vector data in a database.

17. (Original) An image processing system comprising:
search means for searching for an original data file corresponding to an input image;
checking means for checking, based on a user's instruction, whether the input image is to be converted into vector data immediately or later; and

vectorization means for converting the input image, the original data file of which cannot be retrieved, into vector data,

wherein when said checking means determines that the input image is to be converted into vector data immediately, said vectorization means immediately converts the input image into vector data, and when said checking means determines that the input image is to be converted into vector data later, said vectorization means converts the input image into vector data when a predetermined condition is met.

18. (Currently Amended) A computer-executable program stored on a computer-readable medium, said computer-executable program being executable by a computer so as to control the computer to perform image processing, said program comprising:

a code for implementing a search step of searching for an original data file corresponding to an input image;

a code for implementing a checking step of determining, based on a user's instruction, whether the input image is to be converted into vector data immediately or later; and

a code for implementing a vectorization step of converting the input image, the original data file of which cannot be retrieved, into vector data,

wherein the vectorization step includes a step of immediately converting the input image into vector data when it is determined in the checking step that the input image is to be converted into vector data immediately, and converting, when it is determined in

the checking step that the input image is to be converted into vector data later, the input image into vector data when a predetermined condition is met.

19. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable storage medium storing a computer-executable program, said computer-executable program being executable by a computer so as to control the computer to perform image processing, said program comprising:

a code for implementing a search step of searching for an original data file corresponding to an input image;

a code for implementing a checking step of determining, based on a user's instruction, whether the input image is to be converted into vector data immediately or later; and

a code for implementing a vectorization step of converting the input image, the original data file of which cannot be retrieved, into vector data,

wherein the vectorization step includes a step of immediately converting the input image into vector data when it is determined in the checking step that the input image is to be converted into vector data immediately, and converting, when it is determined in the checking step that the input image is to be converted into vector data later, the input image into vector data when a predetermined condition is met.

20. to 30. (Cancelled)

31. (New) An image processing system comprising:

search means for searching for original digital data stored in storage means on the basis of an input image;

extraction means for extracting difference information by comparing the original digital data retrieved by the search means and the input image;

vectorization means for converting the difference information extracted by the extraction means into vector data;

composition means for compositing the difference information that has been converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

checking means for checking whether or not to inhibit information about the retrieved original digital data from being changed,

wherein if it is determined by the checking means that a change in information is not inhibited, the difference information extracted by the extraction means is converted into vector data by the vectorization means, and the difference information that has been converted into the vector data is composited to the original digital data by the composition means, and if it is determined by the checking means that a change in information is inhibited, the difference information extracted by the extraction means and information other than the difference information which is included in the input image are converted into vector data by the vectorization means.

32. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing a computer-executable program, said computer-executable program being executable by a computer so as to control the computer to perform image processing, said program comprising:

a code for implementing a search step of searching for original digital data stored in storage means on the basis of an input image;

a code for implementing an extraction step of extracting difference information by comparing the original digital data retrieved in the search step and the input image;

a code for implementing a vectorization step of converting the difference information extracted in the extraction step into vector data;

a code for implementing a composition step of compositing the difference information that has been converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

a code for implementing a checking step of checking whether or not to inhibit information about the retrieved original digital data from being changed,

wherein if it is determined in the checking step that a change in information is not inhibited, the difference information extracted in the extraction step is converted into vector data in the vectorization step, and the difference information that has been converted into the vector data is composited to the original digital data in the composition step, and if it is determined in the checking step that a change in information is inhibited, the difference information extracted in the extraction step and information other than the difference information which is included in the input image are converted into vector data in the vectorization step.

33. (New) An image processing system comprising:

search means for searching for stored original digital data on the basis of an input image;

extraction means for extracting difference information by comparing the original digital data retrieved by the search means and the input image;

vectorization means for converting the difference information extracted by the extraction means into vector data;

composition means for compositing the difference information that has been converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

storage means for storing the extracted difference information as an independent file, and for storing the original data,

wherein the difference information as the independent file is stored in a format associated with the original digital data, and is composited and output by the composition means when the difference information is to be printed out.

34. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing a computer-executable program, said computer-executable program being executable by a computer so as to control the computer to perform image processing, said program comprising:

a code for implementing a search step of searching for original digital data stored in storage means on the basis of an input image;

a code for implementing an extraction step of extracting difference information by comparing the original digital data retrieved in the search step and the input image;

a code for implementing a vectorization step of converting the difference information extracted in the extraction step into vector data;

a code for implementing a composition step of compositing the difference information that has been converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

a code for implementing a storage step of storing the extracted difference information as an independent file,

wherein the difference information as the independent file is stored in a format associated with the original digital data, and is composited and output in the composition step when the difference information is to be printed out.

35. (New) An image processing system comprising:

search means for searching for original digital data stored in storage means on the basis of an input image;

extraction means for extracting difference information by comparing the original digital data retrieved by the search means and the input image;

vectorization means for converting the difference information extracted by the extraction means into vector data;

composition means for compositing the difference information that has been converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

vectorization means for converting the entire input image into vector data when no original digital file can be retrieved by the search means.

36. (New) A computer-readable storage medium storing a computer-executable program, said computer-executable program being executable by a computer so as to control the computer to perform image processing, said program comprising:

a code for implementing a search step of searching for original digital data stored in storage means on the basis of an input image;

a code for implementing an extraction step of extracting difference information by comparing the original digital data retrieved in the search step and the input image;

a code for implementing a vectorization step of converting the difference information extracted in the extraction step into vector data;

a code for implementing a composition step of compositing the difference information that has been converted into the vector data to the original digital data; and

a code for implementing a vectorization step of converting the entire input image into vector data when no original digital file can be retrieved in the search step.